



## The Way of the Reduction via Anthropology: Husserl and Lévy-Bruhl, Merleau-Ponty and Lévi-Strauss

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**Abstract** This article focuses on the way of phenomenological reduction via anthropology in Edmund Husserl's reading of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's reading of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty begin their considerations with anthropology (the first step of reduction), and go beyond anthropology by going inside of it, into the intercultural phenomenal field (the second step). Husserl, in a letter to Lévy-Bruhl, argues that the intercultural region is opened by considering the primitives' "*Geschichtslosigkeit*" (the first step). This way of reduction could not begin without anthropology. But it could not begin through anthropology alone. There is a way into transcendental phenomenology beyond anthropology (the second step). Owing to their close friendship in the 1950s, Merleau-Ponty learned much from Lévi-Strauss's anthropology. According to Merleau-Ponty, anthropology is "a remarkable method, which consists in learning to see what is ours as alien and what was alien as our own." This method is a kind of reduction that opens the intercultural region (the first step). Anthropology as a method or praxis is coincident with philosophy. Merleau-Ponty explicates the discussions about the "*lateral universal*," "structural history," and the concept of history as "*Institution*" together with anthropology, while simultaneously criticizing anthropology for returning to the objective prejudice (the second step).

Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, was acquainted with French philosopher and anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. In 1929, Husserl received a book titled *Primitive Mentality* from Lévy-Bruhl. The two met each other on the occasion of Husserl's Paris lecture in that year. On March

11, 1935, Husserl wrote a letter to Lévy-Bruhl to acknowledge his receipt of *Primitive Mythology*. This letter was made famous by a phenomenologist of the subsequent generation, Maurice Merleau-Ponty.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to note the extraordinary interest aroused in Husserl by his reading of Lévy-Bruhl's *Primitive Mythology* (*Mythologie primitive*), which seems rather remote from his ordinary concerns. What interested him here was the contact with an alien culture, or the impulse given by this contact to what we may call his philosophical imagination. (*Parcours II*, 120/90)

As Merleau-Ponty notes, Husserl took a “burning interest” (*BW*, 161/349) in the contact with an alien culture that Lévy-Bruhl described. Husserl, who was a glutton for work, as were Paul Cézanne and Paul Valéry, let his own work sit, and immersed himself for several weeks in “the whole series of classic works on the mentality of the primitives” (*BW*, 161/349).<sup>2</sup> He writes, “(f)or me, in the present state of the life's work I have incessantly carried out, this perspective is of the highest interest” (*BW*, 163/352). In section 1, I will discuss Husserl's consideration of the intercultural region through his reading of Lévy-Bruhl's works, which certainly opened his eyes to so-called “primitive”<sup>3</sup> cultures.

Merleau-Ponty, whose work addresses the correspondence between Husserl and Lévy-Bruhl, also had a friendship with the anthropologist, who was the same age as he.<sup>4</sup> Merleau-Ponty and Lévi-Strauss were acquainted

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<sup>1</sup> There are some previous studies about Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl: Dermot Moran and Lukas Steinacher, “Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl: Introduction,” *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* VIII, 2008, pp. 325-347; Javier San Martín, “Husserl and cultural anthropology commentary on Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl,” *Recherches Husserlienne* Vol. 7, 1997, pp. 87-116; Robert Bernasconi, “Lévy-Bruhl among the Phenomenologists: Exoticisation and the Logic of the ‘Primitive’,” *Social Identities* Vol. 11, No 3, 2005, pp. 229-245.

<sup>2</sup> Husserl's private library held the following texts by Lévy-Bruhl (*BW*, 161/349): the French and the German editions of *Primitive Mentality* (*La Mentalité primitive*, Alcan, 1922, and *Die geistige Welt der Primitiven*, trans. Margarethe Humburger, Bruckmann, 1927); the French edition of *Primitives and the Supernatural* (*Le Surnaturel et la nature dans la mentalité primitive*, Alcan, 1931); and *Primitive Mythology* (*La Mythologie primitive. Le monde mythique des Australiens et des Papous*, Alcan, 1935).

<sup>3</sup> The term “primitive” was not used in the eighteenth century by explorers, missionaries and ethnologists, who used the terms “wild,” “barbarian,” or “non-civilized.”

<sup>4</sup> For a recent analysis of Merleau-Ponty's reading of Lévi-Strauss, see Étienne Bimbenet, *Après Merleau-Ponty Études sur la fécondité d'une pensée*, Vrin, 2011.

because they qualified as teachers at the same time, and they met again in 1945 when Lévi-Strauss came back to France. Regarding Lévi-Strauss as a structural anthropologist who constituted a severe challenge to the philosophy of the subject, and regarding Merleau-Ponty as a philosopher who played a part in existentialism alongside Jean-Paul Sartre, it is sometimes assumed that they were in opposition. But they maintained a close friendship during the 1950s and this friendship underlies Merleau-Ponty's writings on Husserl's letter to Lévy-Bruhl which was written in the 1950s. In section 2, I will look at the "untamed region [*la région sauvage*]" (*Signes*, 151/120), considered by Merleau-Ponty through his reading of Lévi-Strauss's works.

This article focuses on the way of phenomenological reduction via anthropology in Husserl's reading of Lévy-Bruhl and in Merleau-Ponty's reading of Lévi-Strauss.

## 1. Husserl's reading of Lévy-Bruhl

### *a. Two letters to Lévy-Bruhl*

In 1935, the year Husserl wrote his letter to Lévy-Bruhl, Lévy-Bruhl received another letter dated March 8 from Henri Bergson who had read *Primitive Mythology*.<sup>1</sup> Bergson had a long-term friendship with Lévy-Bruhl, and regarded as a series Lévy-Bruhl's works on the mentality of the primitives that he had already read. Bergson appreciated that Lévy-Bruhl's works allowed readers to "relive [*revivre*]" the life of "non-civilized" people. Nevertheless, he distinguished his own works from Lévy-Bruhl's, demanding that "the first origin of the static religion"<sup>2</sup> should be analyzed, not from the point of view of primitive society, but from that of the "present day civilized man."<sup>3</sup>

In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (especially in chapter II), published in 1932, Bergson had already criticized Lévy-Bruhl's theory. For

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The following presentation of Lau Kwok-ying was also suggestive; "Levi-Strauss and Merleau-Ponty: from the Nature-Culture Distinction to Savage Spirit and their Intercultural Implications," *The Third and Fourth Symposium of The Research Center for Intercultural Phenomenology*, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, 2011.

<sup>1</sup> H. Bergson, "La correspondance Bergson/Lévy-Bruhl", *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* Vol. 179, No 4, 1989, pp. 481-492.

<sup>2</sup> Bergson, *ibid.*, p. 487.

<sup>3</sup> Bergson, *ibid.*

Bergson, there were not two mentalities, one being the primitive mentality characterized as “prelogical” and “mystical,” and the other the “logical” and “rational” mentality of civilized man.<sup>1</sup> Civilized man differs from primitive man by “the enormous mass of knowledge and habits”<sup>2</sup> which he or she has. Bergson intends to consider what is natural, overlaid by such knowledge and habits.

On the other hand, Husserl regards Lévy-Bruhl’s works as having the same task as “the new publications” (*BW*, 164/353) that he was in the process of preparing. He redrafted his letter several times, and sent the third to Lévy-Bruhl. He explains the reason for his multiple revisions as follows: “For I really wanted to tell you about the problematic that your foundational investigations have set in motion in me and in connection with my long-standing studies on humanity and the environing world [*Umwelt*]” (*BW*, 161/349). Husserl’s letter is more than a simple thank-you note, and we have little chance of understanding it unless we consider his life’s work. In fact, according to Karl Schuhmann, after receiving the letter, Lévy-Bruhl showed it to Aron Gurwitsch and said, “Explain it to me, I understand nothing of it”.<sup>3</sup>

Husserl emphasizes that an important aspect of Lévy-Bruhl’s research is “to ‘empathize’ [*einzufühlen*] with a humanity living self-contained in living generative sociality [*lebendiger generativer Sozialität*]” (*BW*, 162/351). The difference between Husserl’s “empathize” and Bergson’s “re-live” is that Husserl regards Lévy-Bruhl’s “empathize” as research about the environing world. The environing world is the world of the natural attitude in which we live daily life, and Husserl’s “long-standing studies” of this world evolved into his research of the “life-world.” Husserl’s interest in Lévy-Bruhl is related to the former’s research on the life-world. The letter to Lévy-Bruhl should be read in connection with the Vienna lecture of March 1935 entitled “Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity” and *Crisis* which is based on the November 1935 Prague lecture “The Crisis of European Sciences and Psychology.”

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<sup>1</sup> Bergson insists, in his letter to Lévy-Bruhl on September 8, 1932, that he merely pushes the analysis in a new direction, and never criticizes Lévy-Bruhl (Bergson, *ibid.*, pp. 486-487). In fact, Lévy-Bruhl also regards the pre-logical primitive culture as continuing to exist in civilized society, and, in his last days, recants his statement (*Les carnets de Lucien Lévy-Bruhl*, PUF, 1949, p. 131).

<sup>2</sup> Henri Bergson, *Œuvres*, PUF, 1959, p. 999.

<sup>3</sup> *Husserl-Chronik*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1977, p. 459. According to Schuhmann, in Scrap-Book (A. Gurwitsch) written by Spiegelberg, we can see the question that Lévy-Bruhl posed to Gurwitsch: “Expliquez-moi, je ne comprends rien.”

*b. The way of reduction and anthropology*

Husserl continued to renew the phenomenological reduction for many years, and found several ways into the reduction.<sup>1</sup> The Cartesian way “leads to transcendental ego in one leap,” and “brings this ego into view as apparently empty of content, since there can be no preparatory explication” (*Hua VI*, 158/155). In order to redeem “a great shortcoming” (*Hua VI*, 158/155) of the Cartesian way, he explores in *Crisis* “the way into phenomenological transcendental philosophy by inquiring back from the pregiven life-world” (*Hua VI*, 105-193/103-189) and “the way into phenomenological transcendental philosophy from psychology” (*Hua VI*, 194-276/191-265). Around the same time as this new exploration, Husserl wrote his letter to Lévy-Bruhl.

In 1931, Husserl took a negative attitude toward anthropology. He points out, in his “Phenomenology and Anthropology,” the naiveté of “Wilhelm Dilthey’s philosophy of life” as “a new form of anthropology” (*Hua XVII*, 164/485). He was not able to accept it without the phenomenological reduction. But the works of Lévy-Bruhl had a big impact on Husserl who attempted to find ways into phenomenology via criticism of concrete sciences such as logic, psychology, and other objective sciences.<sup>2</sup> It is, as it were, the impact of recognition that there is a way via anthropology. Thus Husserl writes “(f)or me, in the present state of the life’s work I have incessantly carried out, this perspective is of the highest interest” (*BW*, 163/352). He studied Lévy-Bruhl’s books intently, and kept notes about them around the time that he composed his letter.<sup>3</sup>

For Husserl, in contrast to the “empty generalization” (*BW*, 162/351) of “world-representation [*Weltvorstellung*]” (*BW*, 162/350), Lévy-Bruhl’s description of primitive society allows us to learn “the world that actually exists” for “a humanity living self-contained in living generative sociality” (*BW*, 162/351). Despite the fact that Lévy-Bruhl never conducted any fieldwork, the alien cultures that are described in his works give a strong impulse to Husserl’s “philosophical imagination” (*Parcours II*, 120/90), as Merleau-Ponty emphasized. Owing to the insights of anthropology, the philo-

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<sup>1</sup> On the way via psychology and that via the life-world, see Tetsuya Sakakibara, *Die Genesis der Phänomenologie Husserls: Eine Untersuchung über die Entstehung und Entwicklung ihrer Methode*, University of Tokyo Press, 2009. On phenomenological reduction, see Sebastian Luft, “Husserl’s Method of Reduction,” *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, Routledge, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Eugen Fink, “Die Spätphilosophie Husserls in der Freiburger Zeit,” *Edmund Husserl 1859-1959*, Martinus Nijhoff, 1959, p. 108.

<sup>3</sup> *Husserl-Chronik*, p. 459.

sopher obtained examples that he never could have imagined by himself, and he brought richness of content to transcendental subjectivity. This impulse did not merely mean that he learned about the customs of the other culture. We are able to learn “to understand (...) its logic and its ontology, that of its environing world with the respective categories” (*BW*, 162/351). Anthropological empathy and the phenomenology of Husserl allow us to understand the correlation between the world and spiritual life. Thus the empathy is “a possible and highly important and great task” (*BW*, 162/351), and the implications of Lévy-Bruhl’s works are not merely ethnological.<sup>1</sup>

### *c. Geschichtslosigkeit and epoché*

After having mentioned Lévy-Bruhl’s empathy, Husserl writes in his letter as follows:

The primitives’ “lack of history [*Geschichtslosigkeit*]” keeps us from foundering in a sea of historical cultural traditions, documents, wars, politics, and so on, and, consequently, from overlooking the concrete correlation between pure spiritual life and the environing world as its <*i.e.* spiritual life’s><sup>2</sup> validity-formation [*Geltungsgebilde*], and thus also from not making it a central scientific theme. It is obvious that the same task has to emerge now for all humanities accessible to us that are living in self-contained seclusion [*Abgeschlossenheit*] — and indeed now also for those humanities whose self-enclosed community life [*deren abgeschlossenes Gemeinschaftsleben*] consists not in stagnation due to a lack of history (as a life that is nothing but flowing present) but in a truly historical life, which as such a national <life> has future and incessantly wants future. (*BW*, 162/351-352)

It should be regarded as a certain kind of *epoché* that the primitive cultures’ non-historicity interrupts the “foundering in a sea of historical cultural

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, Lévy-Bruhl influenced psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Carl Jung, as well as some philosophers. According to Bernasconi (Bernasconi, *op. cit.*, p. 231), Max Scheler was among the first philosophers who made mention of Lévy-Bruhl (Cf. Max Scheler, *Der Genius des Krieges und der Deutsche Krieg*, Verlag der Weissen Bücher, 1915). Emmanuel Levinas also wrote an essay called, “Lévy-Bruhl and Contemporary Philosophy” (Emmanuel Levinas, *De l’existence à l’existant*, Vrin, 1998). On the relation between Sartre and Lévy-Bruhl, see Frédéric Keck, *Lucien Lévy-Bruhl entre philosophie et anthropologie. Contradiction et participation*, CNRS Éditions, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Translators’ additions and Editor’s additions are in pointed brackets (<...>).

traditions, documents, wars, politics, and so on.” The anthropological research of non-historical society allows us to see the intentional correlations and to find a way of phenomenological reduction via anthropology. We can consider it in the same vein as the way via the life-world. Despite the difference between the non-historical primitive society and the society that has a historical life as a national one, Husserl focuses on common ground between them. Both the primitive society and the society where Husserl lives in had a “concrete correlation between pure spiritual life and the environing world as its <i.e. spiritual life’s> validity-formation,” and they were able to empathize with each other. The phenomenological reduction via anthropology puts the nation and its history in suspension, and opens the sphere where new history is being made. Husserl then argues, in his letter to Lévy-Bruhl, that the intercultural region with its rich content is newly opened by considering the primitives’ lack of history, rather than that primitive people also have their own history, or that primitive culture is inscribed in the history of civilized people.<sup>1</sup>

However, the way of reduction via anthropology does not end with anthropology. Husserl adds, “I see a first beginning that has been opened up by your foundational works” (*BW*, 163/352), but he continues, “I feel certain that on this path of an intentional analysis, which I have already worked out

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<sup>1</sup> The description of non-historicity in Husserl’s letter is regarded as a kind of criticism of history. This reflected the difficult social conditions of that age. In his letter, Husserl writes, “I mention only that I unfortunately have to write many letters to help, with foreign references, as best as I can those who have been legally affected so severely by the <process of> building anew the German nation” (*BW*, 161/350). Among such people, there is Husserl’s own son Gerhart who was, like Lévy-Bruhl’s son, a professor of jurisprudence. Gerhart resigned from his professorship in 1933, and had to “think of building a new future for himself abroad” (*BW*, 161/350). Husserl’s letter to Lévy-Bruhl was a request for help for his son. He wrote such letters to others as well until his son found a position in 1936 (Cf. Javier San Martín, *ibid.*, p. 98).

On the theme of Husserl and the political, see Karl Schuhmann, *Husserl’s Staatsphilosophie*, Verlag Karl Alber Freiburg/München, 1988, and Natalie Depraz, “Phenomenological reduction and the political,” *Husserl Studies* Vol. 12, 1995, pp. 1-17.

On the contrast between the non-historicity and the nation, or on the primitives’ history of combating against the nation, see Pierre Clastres, *La société contre l’État*, Éditions minuit, 1974. And on the different cultural groups in a nation, see Rosemary R. P. Lerner, “Phenomenological reflections on the conditions of cultural and ideological encounters and conflicts,” *The second Symposium of The Research Center for Intercultural Phenomenology*, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, 2010.

extensively, historical relativism proves to be undoubtedly justified (as an anthropological fact) but also that anthropology, like every positive science and its universality [*Universitas*], though the first, is not the final word of knowledge” (*BW*, 163/353). In *Crisis*, we can see the new ways of reduction other than the Cartesian way: the way via psychology and that via the life-world. They necessitate transcendental subjectivity, or lead to the Cartesian way.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the way of reduction via anthropology demands the “universal epoché” (*Hua VI*, 158/155) as the second step. This is the way to the transcendental phenomenology beyond anthropology. In Husserl’s point of view, phenomenological research ascertains the intercultural region that he himself found in conjunction with the anthropology of his own generation. Phenomenology is the ground of the “super-rationalism [*Überrationalismus*]” (*BW*, 164/353) that rises above the relativity of cultures while recognizing it.

## 2. Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Lévi-Strauss

### a. Merleau-Ponty and the ways of phenomenological reduction

As we have seen, the way of phenomenological reduction via anthropology is found in Husserl’s letter to Lévy-Bruhl, which was written around the same time that Husserl followed the way of reduction via psychology and that via the life-world. These new ways were passed on Merleau-Ponty. In “The Nature of Perception,” which is the plan for *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty had already written “The important thing is to renew psychology on its own terrain” (*Primat*, 22). Merleau-Ponty’s important work *Phenomenology of Perception* then follows the way of reduction via psychology.

Merleau-Ponty enters “the phenomenal field” by way of Gestalt psychology. It is Gestalt psychology that allows him to go beyond objective prejudice such as the “constancy hypothesis,” and to describe “the world as perceived [*le monde perçu*]” or “the world of living experience [*le monde vécu*].” But the phenomenological reduction in *Phenomenology of Perception*

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<sup>1</sup> See Sakakibara, *ibid.*, p. 427. Ludwig Landgrebe’s interpretation of Husserl’s turn against Cartesianism needs to be modified. (Cf. Ludwig Landgrebe, *Der Weg der Phänomenologie: Das Problem der ursprünglichen Erfahrung*, Gütersloh, Mohn, 1963. )

does not end with this. Gestalt psychology's criticism of the constancy hypothesis remains a criticism of "psychological atomism" (PP, 62/51), and does not enter fully into criticism of the dogmatic belief in the objective world. "Gestalt psychology cannot see that psychological atomism is only one particular case of a more general prejudice" (PP, 62/51). Using Gestalt psychology, Merleau-Ponty overcomes the objectivistic prejudice that can even be found in Gestalt psychology itself. In other words, Gestalt psychology outruns itself through its own momentum, and becomes phenomenology. "(T)he constancy hypothesis carried to its logical conclusion assumes the value of a genuine 'phenomenological reduction'" (PP, 58/47).

But *Phenomenology of Perception* did not follow the way via anthropology. Merleau-Ponty refers to "the cultural world" or "the social world" in the chapter entitled "Other Selves and the Human World." But anthropology and sociology began more intensive in the works of Merleau-Ponty when, in the 1950s, he met Lévi-Strauss again. Their friendship was very close. For instance, Merleau-Ponty participated in a conference at which Lévi-Strauss read his paper,<sup>1</sup> and in a lecture (1959-1960), referred to the exhibition catalog to which Lévi-Strauss had contributed.<sup>2</sup> As is well known, Lévi-Strauss dedicated his book *The Savage Mind* to Merleau-Ponty. And in *Les Temps Modernes* (March-April 1998), Lévi-Strauss rejects the interpretation that there is a "fundamental divergence in opinion" (RA, 71) between them. Christian Delacampagne and Bernard Traimond say in their article in *Les Temps Modernes* (November-December 1997)<sup>3</sup> that Merleau-Ponty and Sartre are similar to each other as long as they go down the different path from Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology,<sup>4</sup> and that Merleau-Ponty's praise of Lévi-Strauss in his article "From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss" conceals the criticisms. Lévi-Strauss refutes them directly.

Except for the phenomenological ambition, in certain aspects, Merleau-Ponty and I stood closer to each other than he and Sartre did. (RA, 75)

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<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Sur les rapports entre la mythologie et le rituel," *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie*, No 50/3, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Masque. Décembre 1959-Mai 1960. Musée Guimet Paris*, Éditions des musées nationaux, 1960.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Delacampagne et Bernard Traimond, "La Polémique Sartre/Lévi-Strauss revisitée," *Les Temps Modernes*, No 596, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Delacampagne and Traimond names three philosophers as critics of Lévi-Strauss: Merleau-Ponty, Althusser, and Derrida (Delacampagne and Traimond, *ibid.*, pp. 23-26).

Merleau-Ponty aided Lévi-Strauss's election to the Collège de France in 1959, and "From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss" is an excerpt of "Report for Creation of a Social Anthropology Chair" that was written to persuade the professoriate.<sup>1</sup> According to Lévi-Strauss, Merleau-Ponty is far from criticizing him: "in faithful accordance with this kind of law, the report of Merleau-Ponty is a montage" (RA, 71), and Merleau-Ponty "cuts, reuses, resumes, and paraphrases" (RA, 71) his books and articles.

In fact, in "From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss," Merleau-Ponty paraphrases Lévi-Strauss's works such as "Introduction to the Works of Marcel Mauss,"<sup>2</sup> *Structural Anthropology*, and *Titles and Works*, and he nowhere in the recommendation interprets Lévi-Strauss in a negative light. However it is worth remembering that Merleau-Ponty's reading of Lévi-Strauss is written from the perspective of "the phenomenological ambition" which Lévi-Strauss excluded. Merleau-Ponty talks about the closeness (or the distance) between phenomenology and anthropology from the point of view of a philosopher or phenomenologist. He enters into phenomenology via anthropology.

#### *b. Comprehensive experience and the phenomenological reduction*

The following citation is a phrase in "From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss" which Delacampagne and Traimond regard as a criticism of Lévi-Strauss, and which Lévi-Strauss regards as a paraphrase of *Structural Anthropology*.

It is a question of constructing a general system of reference in which the point of view of the native, the point of view the civilized man, and the mistaken views each has of the other can all find a place—that is, of constituting a more comprehensive experience which becomes in principle accessible to men of a different time and country. (*Signes*, 150/120)

Merleau-Ponty gives sufficient credit for anthropology in that it can give us a "comprehensive experience." He holds the myth of Oedipus up as an example of this experience. Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis casts new light

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<sup>1</sup> According to Lévi-Strauss (RA, 71), in order to write "From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss," Merleau-Ponty deleted six lines from the top of "Report for Creation of a Social Anthropology Chair", and at the end of it, added a two pages summary of the section "Project of Teaching" from Lévi-Strauss's *Titles and Works* (TT, 11-18).

<sup>2</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction à l'œuvre de Marcel Mauss," in Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et Anthropologie*, PUF, 1950, pp. IX-LII. English translation: *Introduction to the Works of Marcel Mauss*, trans. Felicity Baker, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.

on the myth of Oedipus. According to Lévi-Strauss, there are similarities between the Oedipus legend and the legends of “North American Indians”: the very precautions taken to avoid incest serve to render it inevitable. We can also see in both legends “the difficulty of walking straight,” “the murder of a chthonian creature,” “(m)an’s relationship to the earth” (*Signes*, 152/121), etc. For Lévi-Strauss, these similarities are not mere coincidences. “If a myth is made up of all its variants, structural analysis should take all of them into account” (*AS*, 249/217). Owing to Lévi-Strauss’s structural analysis of myth, the myth of Oedipus—which plays an important role in Freud’s psychoanalysis—can be read as a variant of the universal myth about the prohibition of incest. From Lévi-Strauss’s perspective, the psychoanalyst is the shaman, or the witch doctor. “The patient suffering from neurosis eliminates an individual myth by facing a real psychologist; the native woman in childbed overcomes a true organic disorder by identifying with a mythically transmuted shaman” (*AS*, 228/199).<sup>1</sup> The shaman is, like the psychoanalyst, the object of transference.

On the one hand, “(o)ur psychosomatic investigations enable us to understand how the shaman heals, how for example he helps in a difficult delivery” (*Signes*, 153/122). On the other hand, with the help of the Lévi-Strauss’s “comprehensive experience,” we can learn to see psychoanalysis as a myth, and the psychoanalyst as a shaman. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty defines anthropology as “a remarkable method, which consists in learning to see what is ours as alien and what was alien as our own” (*Signes*, 151/120). For Merleau-Ponty, anthropology is not a specialty, but a method. “We also become the ethnologists of our own society if we set ourselves at a distance from it” (*Signes*, 151/120).

Seeing the phrase “leaning to see what is ours as alien,” readers of Merleau-Ponty will be reminded of a phrase in *Phenomenology of Perception*: “True philosophy consists in relearning to see the world” (*PP*, XVI/xx). “It is because we are through and through compounded of relationships with the world that for us the only way to become aware of the fact is to suspend the resultant activity” (*PP*, VIII/xii) and “wonder in the face of the world” is “(t)he best formulation of reduction” (*PP*, VIII/xii). Phenomenological reduction allows us to relearn to see the world. Anthropology-as-method is to step back to see another society or our own, that is, it is “the way which imposes itself when the object is “different,” and requires us to transform ourselves” (*Signes*, 150/120). In this sense, this method is the phenomeno-

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<sup>1</sup> The similarity between the care of the shaman and that of the psychoanalyst is also discussed in *Titles and Works* (*TT*, 16).

logical reduction. Going through anthropology can lead us to the “untamed region [*la région sauvage*]” (*Signes*, 151/120), unincorporated in our own culture, through which we communicate with other cultures.

*c. Lévy-Bruhl and Lévi-Strauss*

As if in response to “From Mauss to Claude Lévi-Strauss,” Lévi-Strauss, in an excerpt from the inaugural lecture of the chair of social anthropology at the Collège de France, “The Problem of Invariance in Anthropology,” talks again about the similarities between the myth of Oedipus and North American Indian myths, and cites a passage from Merleau-Ponty’s “The Philosopher and Sociology”:

As M. Merleau-Ponty has written: “Each time the sociologist [but he is thinking of the anthropologist] returns to the living sources of his knowledge, to that which operates in him as a means of understanding the cultural formations furthest removed from himself, he spontaneously philosophizes.” (*PI*, 29/24)<sup>1</sup>

Merleau-Ponty deals with Husserl’s letter to Lévy-Bruhl in “The Philosopher and Sociology” and what he calls sociology here is anthropology, as Lévi-Strauss points out. There are valid criticisms of Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Husserl’s letter, wherein Merleau-Ponty claims that Husserl, at the end of his life, gave up his efforts to think of the “imaginary variation,” and came to see the value of relativism.<sup>2</sup> As we have already seen, the new ways of reduction inevitably lead to the Cartesian way, and Husserl does not enter the new ways, abandoning his original standpoint. Husserl sees a certain value to relativism, but does not accept it voluntarily. But Merleau-Ponty, in his interpretation of Husserl’s letter, does not end with a confirmation of the philosopher’s frustration in the face of the facts, as the phenomenological reduction in *Phenomenology of Perception* does not mean just the return to the life-world from the objective world; it also leads us to phenomenology beyond psychology. Both philosophy and sociology (anthropology) philosophize. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty does not say that Husserl became a relativist. The reason Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the impulse given to Husserl by Lévy-Bruhl’s relativism is because he tries to demonstrate that

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Signes*, 138/110.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *L’origine de la géométrie*, traduction et introduction par Jacques Derrida, PUF, 1962.

although philosophy and sociology seem to have existed under “a segregated system” (*Signes*, 123/98), their practices are not exclusive.

But Merleau-Ponty contends that the anthropology of Lévy-Bruhl does not enter fully into the untamed region that both philosophy and anthropology explore. Lévy-Bruhl was influenced by Émile Durkheim, but he disagrees with Durkheim’s supposition, that is, the universal rationality of all humans, and addresses the logic of the primitive society. From Merleau-Ponty’s perspective, neither Durkheim’s universalism nor Lévy-Bruhl’s relativism capture the “access to another person which (...) defines sociology” (*Signes*, 144/115). Lévy-Bruhl “congeal(s)” the primitive society “in an insurmountable difference” (*Signes*, 144/115). For Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss thinks that “we understand someone else without sacrificing him to our logic or it to him” (*Signes*, 144/115).

Lévi-Strauss criticizes preceding studies in ethnology, refusing to use the terms “primitive” or “retarded” to describe people who “enjoy the peculiar distinction of having endured without possessing any history” (*AS*, 121/103; Cf., *RA*, 66-67). “A primitive people is not a backward or retarded people. (...) Nor do primitive peoples lack history, although its development often eludes us” (*AS*, 120/102). The societies that had been labeled “primitive” Lévi-Strauss calls “cold” societies and distinguishes them from “hot” societies.<sup>1</sup> But he adds that no society is either absolutely cold or hot (*RA*, 67).

Merleau-Ponty perceives “structural history” (*Signes*, 155/123) in Lévi-Strauss’s theory, which does not assimilate the primitive societies too quickly to our logic and does not congeal them “in an insurmountable difference” (*Signes*, 144/115). Structural history is not a chronological history of particular events, but “history which is well aware that myth and legendary time always haunt human enterprises in other forms, which looks on the near or far side of minutely divided events” (*Signes*, 155/123). This history makes it possible to see the point of view of psychoanalysis, that of myth and the mistaken views each has of the other. The important thing here is “a sort of lateral universal” (*Signes*, 150/120) which is neither a strictly

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<sup>1</sup> Lévi-Strauss also distinguishes between “hot” and “cold” societies in “The Problem of Invariance in Anthropology,” *The Savage Mind*, and *Race and History* etc. According to him, hot societies appeared at various spots in the world beginning after the Neolithic revolution. In these societies, differentiations among dominator and dominated “might be utilized for the production of culture, at a speed inconceivable and un hoped for up to that time” (*PI*, 32/27). Cold societies assure at once a modest standard of living and the protection of natural resources.

objective universal, nor strict relativism. Structural history is not an external observer's history, nor the actors' interior history, but intercultural history, which is created at the point where they intersect. This history is called "Institution"<sup>1</sup> by Merleau-Ponty.

*d. Proximity and distance between phenomenology and anthropology*

The true problem is to understand why such different cultures become involved in the same search and have the same task in view (and when the opportunity arises, encounter the same modes of expression). We must understand why what one culture produces has meaning for another culture, even if it is not its original meaning. (*Signes*, 84/67-68)

This question appears in Merleau-Ponty's article about André Malraux's imaginary museum, in which Merleau-Ponty talks about the institution of a painter's work, or of a style in the history of painting. Institution is "the events which deposit a sense in me, not just as something surviving or as a residue, but as the call to follow, the demand of a future" (*IP*, 124/77), that is, the "internal circulation between the past and the future" (*IP*, 125/78). The effort and the interest of the painter is prospective, but there are the "resumption(s) [*reprise(s)*]" (Cf., *Signes*, 73/59) of his own past works or those of other painters. Works that were created in the past seem to shut out the future, but in actuality, they wish to continue into the future. Institution is the history before the dichotomy between private and public, subject and object, relativity and universality—that is, the history that creates the relationship between subject and object. In this sense, Lévi-Strauss's structural history is the institution. He puts the philosophical problem into practice.

Lévi-Strauss also claims that anthropology spontaneously philosophizes. "And, as a matter of fact, research in the field, where every ethnological career begins, is the mother and nursemaid of doubt, the philosophical attitude par excellence" (*PI*, 29/24). This philosophical attitude, which is called "anthropological doubt" (*PI*, 29/24) by Lévi-Strauss, is not an attitude of objective observation that "roams over [*survoler*]" (*Signes*, 144/115) the

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty, in his lecture "Institution in Personal and Public History," discusses the institution of life, a feeling, a work of art, and a domain of knowledge. The "Oedipal conflict" (*IP*, 124/77) is mentioned as an example of the institution of life. The institution of life includes animal behaviors such as the "Imprinting" (*IP*, 51/17) of animals.

object, but a patient and determined effort to enter into its object. “Let us resist the charms of a naïve objectivism, while we understand that the very precariousness of our position as observers provides us with unsuspected guaranties of objectivity” (*PI*, 30/26). Caught in an intercultural situation, the anthropological doubt is precarious, cannot avoid misunderstanding, and requires repeated attempts. While anthropology does risk dangers, however, it also shows us the fecundity of cultures, and opens a field of investigation.

But in the view of Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss does not enter fully into the way of anthropological doubt. We can see the criticism of anthropology and Lévi-Strauss in “The Philosopher and Sociology” and the lecture of Collège de France in 1954-55 titled “Institution in Personal and Public History”. These show not only the closeness between philosophy and anthropology, but also the conflict between them. If they were completely segregated, there would be no conflict between them. The conflict exists as long as the proximity exists. Merleau-Ponty discusses “Lévi-Strauss’s difficult position. <He> asserts absolute knowledge and at the same time absolute relativism” (*IP*, 120/74). When Lévi-Strauss talks of the universality of relativity, he holds a position of “an absolute observer, Cosmotheoros [Kosmotheoros]” (*IP*, 120/73), and returns to the objective prejudice. Merleau-Ponty criticizes that the sociologist (anthropologist) demands his privileged position, while the sociologist consider the philosopher’s universalism as prejudice which is proper to European culture.

“You believe you think for all times and all men,” the sociologist says to the philosopher, “and by that very belief you only express the preconceptions or pretensions of your culture.” That is true, but it is no less true of the dogmatic sociologist than it is of the philosopher. (*Signes*, 137/109)

Merleau-Ponty does accept some aspects of the sociologist’s criticism. In his 1948 radio lecture, he had already said that the classical philosophy viewed primitive people, animals, children, craziness as unimportant (*Causeuses*, 33-42). In his lecture at Collège de France in 1959-60, he talked about masks of the Inuit<sup>1</sup>, considering the “intertwining [*Ineinander*]” of humanity-animality, the humanity that grounds the animal as animal, and the animality that grounds man as man (*Nature*, 269, 277/208, 214, 306-307). Seen from this point of view, it might be possible to take Husserl as a European chauvinist, since he said in the Vienna lecture that “Eskimos or

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty offers a careful reading of the exhibition catalog titled *Le Masque* (Evelyne Lot-Falck, “Les Masques Esquimaux,” *Le Masque. Décembre 1959-Mai 1960. Musée Guimet Paris*, Éditions des musées nationaux, 1960).

Indians presented as curiosities at fairs, or Gypsies, who constantly wander about Europe” do not belong to Europe “in the spiritual sense” (*Hua VI*, 318-319/272). But Merleau-Ponty insists “Certainly nothing was more foreign to Husserl than a European chauvinism. For him European knowledge would maintain its value only by becoming capable of understanding what is not itself” (*Parcours II*, 119/89).

Merleau-Ponty focuses on the role of philosophy in the last part of Husserl’s letter to Lévy-Bruhl. On the one hand, philosophy sees the value of relativism, but on the other hand, it “would gain autonomy after, not before, positive knowledge” (*Signes*, 136/108). “(P)hilosophy has dimension of its own, the dimension of coexistence — not as a *fait accompli* and an object of contemplation, but as the milieu and perpetual event of the universal *praxis*” (*Signes*, 141-142/113). Philosophy does not hold the position of an objective observer outside history. It is the inherence in a historical situation to lead us to the other situation. Philosophy is not the “premature rationalizations” (Comte) (*PP*, 338/292) that make the myth incomprehensible, but “(r)eason as a summons and a task” (*Signes*, 139/110). Truth is no longer understood as completely positive. Philosophy is an attempt to correctly stay in the place where “truth and error dwell together,” in the “comprehensive experience,” in the “untamed region.”

At the point where two cultures cross, truth and error dwell together either because our own training hides what there is to know from us, or on the contrary, because it becomes, in our life in the field, a means of incorporating other people’s differences. (*Signes*, 151/120)

## Conclusion

I have shown in this article the way to phenomenological reduction via anthropology in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. In his letter to Lévy-Bruhl, Husserl argues that the intercultural region, which is rich in content, is newly opened by considering primitive culture’s “lack of history.” This is the first step of reduction. But this way of reduction could begin neither without anthropology nor with anthropology alone. As the second step, there is a way into transcendental phenomenology beyond anthropology.

In section 2, I have also discussed the proximity and distance between Merleau-Ponty and Lévi-Strauss. Owing to their close friendship in the 1950s, Merleau-Ponty learned much from Lévi-Strauss’s anthropology. Anthropology is a method which consists in learning to see what is ours as

alien and what was alien as our own. This method is a kind of reduction that opens the intercultural region. Anthropology as a method or praxis is coincident with philosophy. Merleau-Ponty explicates the discussions about a “lateral universal”, “structural history”, and “Institution” together with anthropology. But he also criticizes anthropology for returning to objective prejudice.

Both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty begin their consideration with anthropology (the first step), and go beyond anthropology by going inside of it, into the intercultural phenomenal field (the second step). For them, the encounter with anthropology is a wonder, and allows them to relearn to see the world.

### Abbreviations

The works of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Lévi-Strauss are referred to with the following abbreviations, followed by page numbers of the original edition and the English translation.

#### *Edmund Husserl*

- [BW] *Briefwechsel*, Bd. 7, *Wissenschaftlerkorrespondenz*, hrsg. von Karl Schuhmann, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994. English translation: “Letter to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl(1935),” *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy* VIII, 2008, pp. 349-354.
- [Hua VI] *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, Husserliana Bd. 6, hrsg. von W. Biemel, Martinus Nijhoff, 1954. English translation: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr, Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- [Hua XVII] *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922-1937)*, Husserliana Bd. 27, hrsg. von Thomas Nenon und Hans Rainer Sepp, Kluwer, 1988. English translation: *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927-1931)*, ed. and trans. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer, Kluwer, 1997.

*Maurice Merleau-Ponty*

- [PP] *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Gallimard, 1945. English translation: *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge, 1994.
- [Signes] *Signes*, Gallimard, 1960. English translation: *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary, Northwestern University Press, 1964.
- [Nature] *La Nature. Notes, cours du Collège de France*, établi et annoté par Dominique Ségler, Seuil, 1995. English translation: *Nature, Course Notes from the Collège de France*, trans. Robert Vallier, Northwestern University Press, 2003.
- [Primat] *Le Primat de la perception et ses conséquences philosophiques*, Verdier, 1996.
- [Parcours II] *Parcours deux 1951-1961*, Verdier, 2000. English translation: *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, The Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie, Northwestern University Press, 1964.
- [Causeries] *Causeries 1948*, Seuil, 2002.
- [IP] *L'Institution, la passivité. Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954-1955)*, Belin, 2003. English translation: *Institution and Passivity. Course Notes from the Collège de France (1954-1955)*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey, Northwestern University Press, 2010.

*Claude Lévi-Strauss*

- [AS] *Anthropologie structurale*, Pocket, 2003. English translation: *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, Penguin Books, 1972.
- [TT] *Titres et travaux Projet d'enseignement*, Centre de documentation universitaire, 1958.
- [PI] "Le problème de l'invariance en anthropologie," *Diogène* No 31, 1960, pp. 23-33. English translation: "The Problem of Invariance," trans. James H. Labadie, *Diogenes: A Quarterly Publication of the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies* No 31, 1960, 19-28.
- [RA] "Retours en arrière," *Les Temps Modernes*, No 598, 1998.